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PP RUEHDE RUEHDIR  
DE RUEHKU #0146 0311428  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 311428Z JAN 07  
FM AMEMBASSY KUWAIT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8181  
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS KUWAIT 000146

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FOR NEA/ARP

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KISL](#) [KIRF](#) [KU](#)  
SUBJECT: KUWAITI SHIA MARK ASHOURA PEACEFULLY THOUGH  
GOVERNMENT PREVENTS MARCHES

REF: A. 06 KUWAIT 493  
[1](#)B. 05 KUWAIT 766

[1](#)1. (SBU) Kuwaiti Shia celebrated Ashoura on January 30 and 31 in Shia neighborhoods and at husseiniyas (Shia diwaniyyas) around Kuwait City. The celebrations included chanting and self-flagellation and gatherings at husseiniyas where clerics gave sermons focusing on the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the Prophet Muhammad's grandson. No significant security incidents were reported.

[1](#)2. (SBU) With regional tensions high, and amid loud warnings from local Salafi groups, the GOK took steps to lower the public profile of Ashoura commemorations. In the heavily Shia and Iranian Rumaithiyya neighborhood of Kuwait City, the Ministry of Interior (MOI) barred the kind of Ashoura marches that take place around the Shia world and which have been permitted in previous years in Kuwait. MOI officials told the press that the denial of permission was meant to preserve the security of the "citizens and residents of Kuwait." The MOI said it had positioned 150 officers and smaller numbers of special forces in Rumaithiyya and other neighborhoods to guard against potential problems. Shia were allowed to walk freely in Shia neighborhoods to visit husseiniyyas and to observe their Ashoura custom of distributing cold drinks to passersby.

[1](#)3. (SBU) An Embassy contact told PolOffs at an English-language husseiniyya on the evening of January 30 that the MOI had made it known that public reenactments of the battle of Karbala would not be allowed. He said this was unfortunate and attributed the restriction to the growing influence of "extremists." He conceded that the Government did not interfere with reenactments inside husseiniyyas. Public reenactments have been forbidden on occasion in the past, with control being more strict in times of heightened sectarian tensions, such as during the Iran-Iraq war.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Comment: The Kuwaiti media has been filled in recent days with sharp exchanges between Shia leaders and Sunni Salafis. Many commentators, and the Kuwaiti Amir himself, have responded with calls to resist sectarian strife. Although there was some grumbling among Shia about restrictions on their marches and reenactments, in the end there were few signs these rising tensions had gone beyond the level of rhetoric.

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